

## Energy Drinks and Teenagers

They come in a variety of different names: Full Throttle, Rock Star, Monster, Red Bull, NOS just to name a few. They are energy drinks and they belong to the fastest growing U.S. beverage market. As youth workers we are around the school a lot and notice that many kids are drinking energy drinks frequently. There have been a number of recent studies that suggest that overuse of these products is harmful to teenagers but more research is needed to determine long-term effects. This article is simply being written to help parents know what is in energy drinks and what the possible harms are to kids that drink too many of them. Ingredients of each brand are different but here are some common ingredients and the amounts that are often found in the drinks:

**Guarana-** This is a caffeine compound that equals 40 mg of caffeine per gram.

**Caffeine-** A cup of coffee generally contains between 80 and 120 mg of caffeine. Many energy drinks contain far higher amounts of caffeine because they are often made in bigger cans or bottles. The larger containers are found to have between 155 to 505 mg of caffeine in them.

**Ginseng-** Known for boosting athletic performance, strengthening the immune system and improving mood when used appropriately. This ingredient is also linked to insomnia, headache and hypertension when too much is taken.

**Sugar-** Energy drinks contain between 21 to 34 g of sugar per 8 oz. With bigger containers and kids drinking 2 or 3 drinks they could be ingesting between 120 to 180 mg of sugar or 4 to 6 times the maximum recommended intake.

**Taurine & Carnitine-** These are amino acids that are added to the drinks although no side effects appear to come from the level in the drinks.

**B Vitamins-** There are no known side effects from the level in the drinks.

By looking at the ingredients and the amounts of some of them in the drinks it is likely that kids that drink 3 or 4 a day may encounter some side effects. There are reports of kids that have suffered from seizures, heart palpitations, nausea, diarrhea, nervousness and hyperactivity after consuming too many energy drinks. Other reports indicate that teenagers prone to depression or those who smoke marijuana and drink alcohol are more likely to consume energy drinks as well. Researchers do not have an explanation for this and say more studies are needed to determine why.

By looking at this information it is fair to say that parents should be paying attention to their children and inquiring on how many energy drinks they are consuming. If you are concerned about sleep impairment and/or trouble getting your teen up, you may want to ask whether or not your child is consuming energy drinks to see if this is attributing to the issues.

It is our hope that this information is helpful to you as a parent and you can make your own judgments as to what you feel is appropriate for your children when it comes to the amount of energy drinks that you allow them to consume.